

- Gewirtz (Page 1)
- Halpern (Page 3)

MISHPATIM

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CANTILLATION: SOME OBSERVATIONS -
PART 2

WILLIAM GEWIRTZ, a former CTO of AT&T Business, is a consultant in the technology and communications sector.

Introduction

Part 1 of this essay briefly introduced the *trop*, followed by a study of its significance in some **local contexts**, concluding with some evidence of *trop's* rabbinic origin. Part 2 looks at *trop* in its **global context**, structuring the two parts of most *pesukim*, until and after the word containing an *etnahta*. The process by which the *trop* operates demonstrates its recursive nature, providing a very early example of recursion in a musical context.

Trop contains 4 levels of separators (*mafsikim*) and a single set of connectors (*meshartim*). All *trop* symbols are either separators or connectors. The first level separators (often referred to as *keisarim*, Caesars) are the *sof pasuk*, which ends the sentence, and the *etnahta*, which divides the *pasuk* into two parts, analogous to a semicolon. Both parts of the sentence, before and after the *etnahta*, are treated identically by the rules of *trop*. The second level of separators (often referred to as *melakhim*, kings), the *zakeif katan*, *zakeif gadol*, *segol*, *shalsholet* and *tipha*, define the major structure of the *pasuk*. *Pashta*, *revi'i*, and *tevir*, an additional level lower, are common third level separators, while *darga*, *pazeir*, and *telisha gedolah* are common fourth level separators.

Munah, *merha*, *mahapah*, and *kadma* are common connectors; there should not be an apparent pause between the reading of words where they appear and the following word.

Trop identifies the *pasuk's* structure both at a global / macro level (the entire *pasuk*, or its two components divided by the *etnahta*) and at a local / micro level (each individual phrase).

***Trop* is Recursive**

Recursion is primarily a mathematical notion which operates on an entity, dividing that entity into parts where at least one part is operated on by the identical process. One can think of this as an arbitrary number of Russian [matryoshka](#) (often called Babushka) dolls, each embedded in another.

In a brilliant book, [Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid](#), Douglas Hofstadter shows that recursion, which in mathematics was

brought to its ultimate use by Kurt Gödel, was also present in painting (such as by Escher) and music (such as by Bach). In music, recursion involves a (completely or partially) identical pattern that repeats (iteratively) within a pattern. Recursion was present in the *trop* 1,000 years before its occurrence in Bach's music, albeit with *trop's* much less intricate musical scope.

***Trop's* global operation**

Except for short *pesukim*, the vast majority of *pesukim* contain one *etnahta* that divides the *pasuk* into its two principal parts.¹ Going forward, we refer to either a short *pasuk* or to either of the two parts of a longer *pasuk* as an **initial segment**. *Trop* operates independently on each individual segment. Note that all initial segments end with a first level *mafsik*, either a *sof pasuk* or an *etnahta*. The lower level *mafsikim* (listed above) further divide the *pasuk* into smaller segments.

Trop's operation on a segment is governed by the following rules:

1. Read the segment (from right to left) until the first *mafsik* one level lower than the *mafsik* on which the segment ends is encountered.
2. If such a *mafsik* is encountered, divide the segment into two, with the *mafsik* acting as the separator. Those two segments are then operated on again by the rule.
3. If a *mafsik* one level lower is not found, the segment is not further divisible, and no further operation is performed.

Since all *pesukim* are of finite length, part 3 of the rule will eventually occur either because

- the *mafsik* at the end of the segment is at level 4 (and there are no *mafsikim* of a lower level), or
- even though the segment ends with a *mafsik* of levels 1, 2, or 3, no *mafsik* one level lower is present.

One of the fundamental rules of *trop* forbids the presence of a *mafsik* of lower level than the level being sought. For example, if a segment ends with a second level *mafsik* and there is no third level *mafsik* earlier in the segment, one can be certain that a fourth level *mafsik* will also not be present.

¹ Of the 5,853 *pesukim* in the Torah only 372 do not contain an *etnahta*; see <https://quantifiedcantillation.nl/>.

When operating with the rules of *trop* on any segment, the rule will divide that segment into two parts, providing it finds a *mafsik* one level lower; the part to the right ends on the word containing the *mafsik*, and the part to the left is the remainder of the original segment. This pattern repeats on any segment, regardless of length.² The rule's identical repetition on both segments demonstrates its recursiveness.³

Consider the second *pasuk* in Ki Tavo ([Deuteronomy 26:2](#)). The first part of the *pasuk*

וְלִקְחֶתָּ מִרְאשִׁית אֶרֶץ כְּלִפְרֵי הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר תִּבְרֵא מֵאֲרָצְךָ אֲשֶׁר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לְךָ וְשָׂמֶתָ בִּטְנָא

encounters its first *melekh*, a *tipha*, on the word לְךָ. Note that this symbol accurately divides the first section into two parts; the first part tells us what should be taken, and the second part tells us where it should be placed.

The second part of the *pasuk*,

וְהִלַּכְתָּ אֶל־הַמְּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יְבַחֵר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשֹׂנְאֵי שְׂמוֹ שָׁם:

encounters its first *melekh*, a *zakeif katan*, on the word הַמְּקוֹם. The *pasuk* tells us to travel to the place, and then provides a further description of the place.

The segment comprising the second half of the *pasuk* succinctly illustrates a critical detail that can cause some confusion when separating a *pasuk* into its constituent parts. Consider the two subdivisions of this half-*pasuk*, one up to and including the word הַמְּקוֹם and one after it. The second subdivision can be further divided by a **second level *mafsik***, the *zakeif katan* on the word אֱלֹהֶיךָ. However, the first subdivision is further divided by a **third level *mafsik***, the *pashta* on the word וְהִלַּכְתָּ; Note that it is not the level of a *mafsik*, but its role in the *trop*'s division of a segment, that determines a *pasuk*'s syntax.

Syntax only, not semantics

As noted in Part 1, since *trop* provides only syntax, it can

1. provide likely support for a specific interpretation or
2. be conclusively inconsistent with a specific interpretation.

The following examples, more complex than those covered in Part 1, all contain a separator / connector where the other might be expected, and therefore support dramatically different interpretations.

Consider the semantically ambiguous reply that occurs when a pregnant Tamar confronts Yehudah (Genesis [38:26](#)). Yehudah responds:

בְּנֵי לֹא־נִתְּתִיָּה לְשָׁלָה כִּי־עַל־כֵּן מָמְנִי וַיֹּאמֶר אֶדְקָה יְהוּדָה וַיִּכְר

The first part of the *pasuk* ends on the word מָמְנִי, which contains a *zakeif katan*. The word אֶדְקָה has a *munah*, linking it to the word מָמְנִי. The *trop* is seemingly in accordance with the interpretation given by those such as [Rashbam](#) where Yehudah admits that “she is more

² The book of Esther has particularly long *pesukim*, providing the most involved examples.

³ A detailed recursive algorithm and an example is available [here](#).

righteous than I.” On the other hand, the *trop* is inconsistent with an alternative interpretation, “she is righteous; the child is mine,” which is the interpretation given by [Onkelos](#), [Rashi](#), and others. For that interpretation to be tenable, the word אֶדְקָה would require a *mafsik*.

Often the syntax can provide (nearly) equal support for two alternative interpretations. Consider the brief *pasuk* in Genesis ([49:18](#)) with which Yaakov ends his *berakhah* to Dan:

יְהוָה לְיִשׁוּעָתֶךָ קִנִּיתִי:

An interpretation like: “I await for Your deliverance, O Lord,” as translated by JPS, is inconsistent with the *trop*. Such an explanation would require placing the *tipha* one word further, at קִנִּיתִי. This interpretation is also hard to reconcile with the context, unless God’s deliverance is awaited not on behalf of Yaakov but on behalf of Dan. However, as written, the *trop* is consistent with various semantic alternatives. The sentence can mean “For **deliverance by You**, I have prayed to the Lord,” without stating explicitly for whom deliverance is prayed for. Again, the context more likely implies that Yaakov is praying for Dan’s (or his descendant’s) deliverance. Alternatively, directly addressing Dan, Yaakov tells him that he prays to the Lord for **his deliverance**. This explanation is given by [Rashbam](#).⁴

On occasion, dramatically different semantic interpretations are both possible given the *trop*. In both of the following *pesukim* the *trop* is consistent with either interpretation. First let’s consider [Exodus 8:19](#):

הֲזֵה הָאֵת יְהוָה עִמָּךְ לְמַחֵר וּבֵין עַמִּי בֵּין פְּדוּת וְשִׁמְתִּי:

Does פְּדוּת mean a separation or a salvation? Both interpretations likely agree that God will create a **separation** between the Israelites, who will receive **salvation**, and the Egyptians, who will be **afflicted**. The argument is about the meaning of the word פְּדוּת, either a separation or a salvation, making one word explicit and the other implied. [Onkelos](#) interprets פְּדוּת as salvation, more consistent with its typical meaning; most commentators prefer separation, more consistent with the context of this *pasuk*.

Next, let’s look at Exodus [17:16](#):

וַיֹּאמֶר כִּי־יָד עַל־כֶּסֶף יְהוָה מִלְחָמָה לַיהוָה בְּעַמְלֵק מִדֶּר:

Are we taking an oath, or referring to a time when there is a monarchy? The term יָד עַל־כֶּסֶף is ambiguous. It could mean that one’s hand is on God’s throne, as might happen as one is holding a religious object while taking an oath. This explanation is given by Rav Saadyah Gaon, and likely [Onkelos](#) as well. Alternatively, as posited in [Sanhedrin 20b](#), it could be indicating that the command to obliterate Amalek refers to an era when a king is leading a religious monarchy. Which explanation is correct is disputed by the classical commentaries, some proposing both possibilities.

Dealing with lists

In numerous places, the *trop* deals with the individual elements in a list of items.

Let us first give two examples that comport with what one might sense as the expected case. Numbers ([30:6](#)) and Exodus ([6:3](#)) given below are representative.

⁴ These alternatives would be clearer if there was a ל before Hashem.

- ואם הניא אביה אתה ביום שמעו כל־דְרִיָה וְאַסְרִיָה אֲשֶׁר־אָרְגָה
על־נפְשָׁה לֹא יִקוּם
- וְאָרָא אֶל־אֲבֵרְתֶם אֶל־יִצְחָק וְאֶל־יַעֲקֹב בְּאֵל שַׁדַּי

The first example divides the segment on the word שִׁמְעוּ - if the father objects on the day when he first hears. The second segment then lists two types of restrictions:

1. vows; and
2. self-imposed restrictions.

The second example divides the segment first on the word יַעֲקֹב and then on the word וְאָרָא. God declares he appeared, and then lists the three people to whom He appeared. In both examples, the action applies to all items on the list.

The next example from Numbers (30:3) contains a similar pattern but in reverse, with the list occurring first.

יְחִל אֶסֶר על־נַפְשׁוֹ לֹא שְׁבַעָה לְאֶסֶר אֹהֵשֶׁבַע לַיהוָה נָדָר אִישׁ כִּי־יִדַּר
דְּבָרָו

The segment divides on the word נַפְשׁוֹ, with the first part listing vows and restrictions and the second half admonishing the listener not to profane them.

In the following three examples, only certain elements of the list link to the verb in the opening phrase.

1. Numbers (6:14): כָּבַשׁ בְּנֵי־שָׁנְתוֹ תַמִּים אֶת־קִרְבָּנוֹ לַיהוָה וְהִקְרִיב: וְאִל־אֶחָד לְחַטָּאת לְחַטָּאת בַּת־שָׁנְתָהּ תַמִּימָה אַחַת וְכַבְּשָׁה אֶחָד לְעֹלָה לְשָׁלְמִים תַמִּים
2. Exodus (1:6): הָיָה הַדָּוָר וְכָל יוֹסֵף וְכָל־אֶחָיו וְגַם־יָמָת:
3. Exodus (1:14): בָּחַמְרָו וּבַלְבָּנִים קִשָּׂה בַעֲבֹדָה וַיִּמְרֹרוּ אֶת־חַיֵּיהֶם: בַּשָּׂדֶה וּבְכָל־עֲבֹדָה

In each case, one can assume the verb applies to all elements of the list, despite being syntactically linked **only** to the first element. In Numbers (6:14) the opening phrase וְהִקְרִיב לַיהוָה וְהִקְרִיב אֶת־קִרְבָּנוֹ לַיהוָה presumably applies to the two other elements in the list, even the element occurring in the next segment, **after** the *etnahta*. The *pasuk* may be read as if the phrase is implicitly assumed to be repeated.

The reasons for this syntactic choice may often be semantic or stylistic.⁵ In the second example above, it is highly plausible that the *pasuk* is ranking the people mentioned: Joseph is most important, followed by his brothers, and finally other members of his generation. There are many other examples, sometimes with a less compelling assumed ranking among list members. The last example may link to the most prevalent work performed. Many other examples that occur in the Torah are less clear.

Conclusions

The formality introduced is necessary to guide a beginner trying to parse a sentence following the rules associated with the *trop*.

⁵ Considerations based on length, potential rhythm, dramatic impact, etc. might influence the sequence of *trop* symbols chosen. A semantic reason can also on occasion be linked to a midrashic source, as the genre of *seforim* like *Ve-Yavinu ba-Mikre* by R. Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Gettinger on occasion attempts to demonstrate.

Fortunately, almost anyone experienced with how the *trop* operates can look at a *pasuk* and directly observe the implied levels of division implied. My late father went a step further, claiming that if he assumed a particular interpretation, he could normally deduce the associated *trop*. I inherited my mother's mathematical skills and not my father's literary prowess; on occasion, I still make embarrassing errors studying and teaching *trop*.

PURITAN PURIM

STUART HALPERN is Senior Advisor to the Provost of Yeshiva University and Senior Program Officer of YU's Straus Center for Torah and Western Thought.

Cotton Mather had much to say on how women should behave. In fact, he had much to say on many topics, writing 469 books over his 65 years. As historian Mark Noll has quipped, Mather “never had a thought he felt was unworthy of publication.” Mather’s fittingly titled [*Ornaments for the Daughters of Zion, or, The Character and Happiness of a Vertuous Woman: in a Discourse Which Directs the Female-Sex how to Express, The Fear of God, in Every Age and State of their Life; and Obtain both Temporal and Eternal Blessedness*](#), was published in Boston in 1692. In it, the popular Puritan minister, accomplished scientist, prolific author, owner of the largest private library in the colonies, grandson of Massachusetts Bay Colony spiritual leaders Richard Mather and John Cotton, and son of Harvard President Increase Mather, laid out his vision for womanhood.⁶ In his usage of biblical archetypes to describe the proper behavior of the ideal female (the very phrase “Daughters of Zion” is used in the Bible to connote Jerusalem and its inhabitants)⁷ including maids,⁸ wives,⁹ mothers,¹⁰ and widows,¹¹ Mather demonstrated a particular affinity for a rather surprising biblical character. While in his later [*Magnalia Christi Americana*](#) (1702) Mather used the precedent of Nehemiah, the Persian Jew who rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem in the time of the Second Temple, to describe Massachusetts Bay Colony governor John Winthrop’s building the walls of New England (“our American Jerusalem”), here Mather found his prototype in the form of another Persian Jew, the

⁶ Never one to spare words (in his *Diary* he admits “I am exceedingly sensible that the Grace of Meekness is very defective in me”), Mather later published subsequent works on women, including [*Elizabeth in Her Holy Retirement*](#) (1710) and [*Bethiah: The Glory which Adorns the Daughters of God*](#) (1722), a sequel to *Ornaments*. Mather’s visage, like his pen, was prolific. He was the first American whose portrait others bought and hung in their homes. See Rick Kennedy, [*The First American Evangelical: A Short Life of Cotton Mather*](#) (Grand Rapids, 2015), vi. Noll’s remark about Mather appears in his [*A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*](#) (Grand Rapids, 1992), 86.

⁷ E.g., Zekhariah 9:9 “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem.”

⁸ “She prudently avoids the reading of *Romances*, which do no less naturally than generally inspire the minds of young people.”

⁹ “She will therefore not be too much from home, upon concerns that perhaps to him are *unaccountable*; but if the angels do inquire, where she is, her Husband may reply, as once *Abraham* did, *my wife is in the tent*.”

¹⁰ “’Tis possible, her *Children* may *Sin*; but this causes her presently to reflect upon the Errors of her own *Heart and Life*.”

¹¹ “The *Kindred* of her Expired Husband are also still Welcome and Grateful to her, upon *his account*.”

beautiful and wise Queen Esther.¹² Despite his characteristic verbal gymnastics, however, Mather's attempt to fully appreciate Esther's heroism falls short.

In *Ornaments for the Daughters of Zion*, a conduct and virtue manual, Mather, New England's most "intellectually and spiritually dynamic pastor" and the greatest North American scholar of his era,¹³ brings up Esther multiple times. The first is in praise of the women of his era, whose "beautiful countenance" does not preclude their "good understanding." Such individuals follow in the ancient footsteps of biblical women including Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Esther, who possessed the same "benefits" of good looks and good insight and who simultaneously "feared God." Mather then invokes Esther (juxtaposed to a reference to the *Sotah* ritual) as paradigmatic for women, who should demonstrate resolve and integrity in the face of suspicious husbands, refusing to upset the patriarchal order:¹⁴

She will even Abstain from all appearance of Evil; and as 'tis abominable unto her to Entertain the least groundless and causeless *Jealousie* of her Husband... She affects to be an *Esther*, that is, *A hidden One*. But if a foolish and forward Husband will wrong her, with unjust suspicions of her *Honesty*, she will thence make a Devout Reflexion upon her *Disloyalty* to God; but at the same time very patiently vindicate her *Innocency* to man; and the more *patiently* because the *Water of Jealousie* procures greater Blessings to those that have it Unrighteously and Abusively imposed upon them.

In a similar vein, in the same section, Mather again invokes Esther by taking the prototype one step further. Not only, as described above, does an "Esther" patiently and respectfully (as she is, after all, "a hidden one") disavow suspecting husbands of any suspicions they might have regarding her behavior, Esther also models for women their ability to inspire proper behavior in, and even provide salvation for, their husbands.

¹² While composing *Magnalia Christi*, a history of the founding of Massachusetts Bay Colony written in biblical style that described New England as a redemptive society, Mather took to wearing a skullcap and calling himself "rabbi." At the same time, he was composing a textbook geared towards converting Jews to Christianity. See Arthur Hertzberg, *The Jews in America: Four Centuries of an Uneasy Encounter: A History* (New York, 1989), 39-41. Louis H. Feldman argues that Josephus' *Jewish War* was a particularly influential influence on both Mather and his father in their historical writings and that Cotton took "an extraordinary interest" in Josephus, considering him "a kindred personality, full of soul-searching and very defensive about his actions, very similar to Paul, whose friend, Mather claims, interestingly without evidence, Josephus was." See Feldman, "The Influence of Josephus on Cotton Mather's *Biblia Americana*: A Study in Ambiguity," Shalom Goldman, ed. *Hebrew and the Bible in America: The First Two Centuries* (Hanover, 1993). Feldman describes Cotton Mather's desire to convert Jews to Christianity as "very nearly an obsession for him."

¹³ Kennedy, 86; Hertzberg, 27.

¹⁴ In the colonial era, obedience to one's husband was both a religious and legal requirement and the husband represented the household to the outside world, though on occasions wives acted as "deputy husbands" giving instructions to workers, negotiating with Native Americans, and settling accounts. See Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England 1650-1750* (New York, 1991).

Opportunities are those that a Woman *has* to bring over her Husband unto Real and Serious Godliness, and a Good Woman, will *use* those Opportunities. An *Esther*, a Witty *Esther*, what can't she do with the most haughty Husband in the World?... If her Husband be a Carnal, Prayerless, Graceless man, she will not leave off her Ingenious Perswasions, till it may be said of him, *Behold, he Prayes!*... If her Husband be under the Power of any Temptation, she will do what she can to prevent his *Destruction*."

Mather, of course, was much concerned with preventing societal destruction. He played an active role in the hysteria that emerged in and around Salem, Massachusetts after local women were accused by young girls of witchcraft. The fallout from these accusations, an episode that became known as the Salem Witch Trials, resulted in the executions of 14 women and 5 men in the same year *Ornaments for the Daughters of Zion* was published.¹⁵ Mather was a pillar of Puritan patriarchy. In *Ornaments* he even cites Ahasuerus' decree in [Esther 1:20](#) that "all the Wives give to their Husbands Honour both to Great and Small" as properly demonstrating the "reverence" a wife should have for her husband. As Harvard historian and scholar of early America Laurel Thatcher Ulrich notes, women were thought to play an invisible role in history, "because their bodies impel them to nurture. Their job is to bind the wounds, stir the soup, and bear the children of those whose mission it is to fight wars, rule nations, and define the cosmos." As a contemporary of Mather put it in 1650 describing the unobtrusive, home-centered role women were expected to play, "Woman's the center & lines are men."¹⁶

And yet, Mather saw in the biblical Esther a woman of independent action to be admired. As scholar of religion Ariel Clark Silver notes, Mather's Esther is obedient while at the same time proactive. She is a "good conqueror" who obeys rules but is spiritually independent of her husband, providing him with salvation. Looking past figures in the Christian tradition including Mary, Mather offered his fellow Puritans a heroine from the Hebrew Bible who modelled a willingness to stay faithful unto death, overcome challenges and adversity, and provide

¹⁵ The degree of involvement has been subject to much scholarly debate stemming from the work of Robert Calef, a contemporary of Mather's whose decade-long negative portrayal of the latter, eventually published in a book, colors the modern popular perception (inspiring, for example, Mather appearing in Marvel Comics as a scowling villain wearing a green cape). Mather's recent biographer Kennedy notes how Cotton did not support the push to swiftly execute the accused witches, and was a kindly figure who often visited prisons, hosted countless visitors, including a young Benjamin Franklin, in his vast study, and even housed some of the young women who claimed to be possessed by demons in his own home in an effort to cure them. Per Kennedy, Cotton never attended the trials, though he did preach at one of the executions, and wished to err on the side of leniency with the "witches." "If Cotton's advice had been followed [during the trials], it is safe to assume that matters in Salem would have turned out better" (63). In the words of Feldman, "Cotton Mather has had a bad press."

¹⁶ Ulrich, *Well-Behaved Women Seldom Make History* (New York, 2007), xxi. The title of Ulrich's book stems from a phrase she coined in an article in a 1976 edition of *American Quarterly* that surveyed the literature about women in Mather's era. The phrase was then tweaked (with "seldom" replaced by "rarely") and popularized by journalist Kay Mills, who used it as an epigraph in her history of women in America [From Pocahontas to Power Suits](#).

salvation for others. For his era, this emphasis on Esther - a figure from a story largely marginal to Christians - coupled with his very interest and concern for the inner spiritual lives of women, made Mather rather unique - one might say he was progressive in positioning Esther as a proto-feminist.¹⁷

Ornaments was not the last time Mather would meditate on Esther. His magnum opus, [Biblia Americana](#), the first biblical commentary written in America, which ran a very Mather-ian 4,500 pages and which he worked on from 1693 until his death in 1728, recapped the story and provided the scholarly interpretations current in Mather's time. In it, Mather cites, among his many sources, the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds, Mekhilta, Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer, Zohar, Onkelos, Seder Olam Rabbah, Saadiah Gaon, Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Radak, Nahmanides, Moses of Coucy, Gersonides, Bahya ben Asher, Abravanel, and Seforno, remarking that "the writings of the rabbins [sic] are often very helpful to us."¹⁸ In comments ranging from why Mordechai did not bow down to Haman,¹⁹ to how the myrrh was utilized by the virgins in Ahasuerus' harem,²⁰ to how Esther could ask the Jews to fast for three days straight,²¹ to the "miraculous" timing of Haman's arriving before Ahasuerus when the king was unable to sleep,²² to the custom of reacting to the mention of Haman's name during the reading of the Megillah on Purim,²³ Mather, as always, had much to say. Strikingly, however, very little centered on Esther herself. While Mordechai and Ahasuerus' actions and intentions are elaborated upon in Mather's retelling (Mordechai "exhorted [the Jews] unto Fasting, and Humiliation, and Repentance, & to follow the Example of the Ninivites," and Ahasuerus, upon seeing Haman fall upon Esther's bed, "turned every thing to the worst Sense, and made the Posture of his Petition but the Aggravation of his Crime"), Esther as an actor in her eponymous tale is *a hidden one*, meriting only the mention that "Her Beauty was extraordinary."²⁴

This interpretation of Esther and the legacy of her actions, however, misses the true significance of her story. When Esther is called upon by Mordechai, it is not, as Mather offers in his *Ornaments of the*

¹⁷ See Ariel Clark Silver, [The Book of Esther and the Typology of Female Transfiguration in American Literature](#) (Lanham, 2018), 32-36.

¹⁸ Feldman, 143-144.

¹⁹ "It is not easy to find reason for *Mordecai's* refusing to pay unto *Haman* the Respect which he required & exposing his whole Nation to an Extirpation.... Probably it was because *Haman* was the race of the *Amalekites*, and under the Curse denounced by God upon that Nation; and therefore, he thought it not proper to give that Honour unto him."

²⁰ "Myrrhe, from whence not only a Noble Oyl [oil] was drawn, but being beat unto a Powder, such a Fumigation was made with it."

²¹ "Josephus understands it as only an Abstinence from Delicacies, and a Contentment with Hard & Coarse Fare." For an analysis of Mather's extensive usage of Josephus, see Feldman, 122-155.

²² "Haman should come in at the very Nick of Time, & so determine the Honour, and be made the Instrument of it [ch. 6]; This was from the *Keeper of Israel*, who *never slumbers nor sleeps!* [Psalm 121:4]."

²³ "The Book of *Esther* is read in all their Synagogues: & when the Name of *Haman* occurs, they clap their Hands, and cry out, *Let his memory perish.*"

²⁴ Citations from Harry C. Maddux and Reiner Smolinski (ed.), [Biblia Americana: America's First Bible Commentary. A Synoptic Commentary on the Old and New Testaments. Volume 4: Ezra-Psalms](#) (Heidelberg, 2013), 139-166. For an extensive discussion of the sources Mather drew upon, particularly in his discussion of Mordechai's refusal to bow, see Introduction, 3-7.

Daughters of Zion, to prevent the destruction of her husband, but to risk everything to provide salvation for her nation. And she does so despite the danger approaching her husband, to whom she is subject, presents.²⁵ As Mordechai states in his only recorded words in the entire *Megillah*:

Do not imagine that you, of all the Jews, will escape with your life by being in the king's palace. On the contrary, if you keep silent in this crisis, relief and deliverance will come to the Jews from another quarter, while you and your father's house will perish. And who knows, perhaps you have attained to royal position for just such a crisis. (4:13-14)

Esther the Persian, who until this point hid her Jewish identity, is called upon to save her people as they stand on the precipice of destruction. She is to be Haddasah once more. As *The New York Times* ethicist Kwame Anthony Appiah writes, "identities work only because, once they get their grip on us, they command us, speaking to us as an inner voice; and because others, seeing who they think we are, call on us, too."²⁶ It is Mordechai's beseeching Esther to plead on behalf of her people (4:8), and the courage demonstrated by Esther in entering the king's throne room unannounced and revealing her identity to Ahasuerus at her party, that led to the salvation of the entire nation.²⁷ Contra Cotton Mather's reading, it is the destruction of Mordechai and the Jewish people that Esther prevents, not that of her husband.

In 1912, two hundred and twenty years after Cotton Mather published *Ornaments for the Daughters of Zion*, thirty-eight Jewish women, led by fifty-two-year-old Henrietta Szold, gathered in Harlem, New York on Purim day.²⁸ These women, sensing they were living in an historical era of Jewish national significance, gathered to found a new organization dedicated to promoting Zionism in America and improving the health and welfare of their brethren in Palestine. As political scientist Samuel Goldman has documented, staking a position rather unique among Christians of the time, Cotton Mather's father, Increase Mather, "never wavered in his conviction that God's promise to restore the Jews to their ancient homeland would one day be fulfilled."²⁹ With the flowering of the eventual State of Israel in sight, these women evoked the biblical figure whose dedication to her people inspired their own efforts in ensuring Jewish national survival. They, after some time, decided to name their organization Hadassah. In what can best be described as historical coincidence with a sprinkling of divine humor not unlike the events of *Megillat*

²⁵ For an elaboration of Esther's identity evolution, see Joshua A. Berman, "*Hadassah Bat Abihail: The Evolution of Object to Subject in the Character of Esther*," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 120:4 (2001): 647-669.

²⁶ [The Lies that Bind – Rethinking Identity](#) (New York, 2018), 218.

²⁷ See Linda Day, [Three Faces of a Queen: Characterization in the Books of Esther](#) (Sheffield, 1995) for a discussion of how the Greek translations of Esther emphasize God's historical relationship with the Jewish people in their telling of the story.

²⁸ For more on Szold's story see Pamela S. Nadell, [America's Jewish Women: A History from Colonial Times to Today](#) (New York, 2019), Michael Zion, *Esther: A New Israeli Commentary* (Jerusalem, 2019), 67.

²⁹ [God's Country: Christian Zionism in America](#) (Philadelphia, 2018), 14. Goldman notes that Cotton "initially echoed his father's arguments about the salvation of all Israel, but eventually concluded that the Jews had no further part to play in God's design." (41)

Esther itself, the women had changed the organization's name from what they had agreed upon that Purim day. The original name for Hadassah, the charitable women's organization now 330,000 U.S. members strong? Daughters of Zion. contain the two epidemics raging in Odessa – the Spanish flu and cholera."³⁰

In the early nineteenth century and in response to their own outbreaks of cholera, towns from Massachusetts to Kentucky had observed a public day of fasting and prayer "by designation of the civil authorities."³¹ With no notion as to the cause of the illness, no way to prevent its spread, and no medications to alleviate the suffering, it is little wonder that the Jewish communities turned to folk medicine and married off poor orphans in a Black Wedding. For really, what else was there to do?

As we wait to see how far the current coronavirus outbreak spreads before it eventually sputters out (for, like all other infectious diseases, from cholera to plague, it surely will), we should pause and reflect on our good fortune. We now understand the etiology and can often conquer those diseases that were mysterious and life-threatening to our great-grandparents. Vaccines, public-health interventions, and antimicrobial drugs generally keep us safe. And, in the face of an epidemic, we no longer need to gather at the local cemetery to marry off a destitute couple and invoke God's mercy.

LEHRHAUS EDITORS:

Yehuda Fogel

David Fried

Davida Kollmar

Tzvi Sinensky

Mindy Schwartz Zolty

³⁰ *Odesskiye Novosti*, October 2, 1918.

³¹ *The American Quarterly Register*, November 1832. Vol. 5(2), 97.